

LENT. This Wednesday is **Ash Wednesday**, the beginning of the **Season of Lent**. This is a wonderful time of year, a time to reflect on God’s mercy and love, a love so great and unfathomable that it would lead Him to die for our sins. And so it is also a time to reflect on our failure to love Him in return: to consider our sins and to work to overcome them, by our commitment and His grace.

To this end, Lent brings a much busier liturgical schedule (See bulletin insert!). On Ash Wednesday we will distribute ashes at all the regular Masses (6:30am, 9am and 7pm) plus an additional 12 noon. Ashes may be received by anyone who wishes to repent their sins—Catholic or not, in “good standing” or not. Also, we will be adding a 7pm Mass to every weekday in Lent, with confessions heard before those Masses beginning at 6pm.

Ash Wednesday and **Good Friday** are days of both **fasting and abstinence**. The **law of abstinence** requires that no meat (or milk) may be eaten on these two days, as well every Friday in Lent, binding all Catholics who are 14 years old or older. No other penance may be substituted. The **law of fasting** binds those who are between the ages of 18 and 59. The Church defines “fasting,” for these purposes, as having only one full meal a day, with two additional smaller meals permitted, but only as necessary to keep up strength and so small that if added together they would not equal a full meal. Snacking is forbidden, but that does not include drinks that are not of the nature of a meal. Even though these rules do not bind all age groups, all are encouraged to follow them to the extent possible. Children in particular learn the importance of penance from following the practice of their older family members. Special circumstances can mitigate the application of these rules, i.e., the sick, pregnant or nursing mothers, etc.

Also during Lent, all are encouraged to adopt personal acts of penance, traditionally of three types: **almsgiving** (including acts of charity), **sacrifice** (what you “give up”), and **prayer**. Please choose your penances carefully, considering your health and state in life. Challenge yourself, but pick things you can actually do, rather than things that are lofty but are too hard to do. Offer all this in atonement for your sins and as acts of love for the God who, out of love, died on the Cross for your sins.

The Herald This Week. This week’s Arlington Catholic Herald features a parish profile on St. Raymond’s. As of this writing (Wednesday, 2/15) I have not seen the article, but the reporter interviewed me and several of our staff and parishioners. I’m sure it will be an interesting read for all of us. If you have not received a copy of the Herald in the mail, extra copies are available near the church doors, and you can always go online to read. I’ll make sure a link is put on the parish website.

The Herald Last Week. Last week’s Herald had an excellent article on Bob and Bev Ward, well known to many of you as long-time parishioners, our former DREs, and current leaders of RCIA and Adult Bible Studies. It is an article about a truly Catholic marriage, one of romance but also deeply rooted in the true love of Christ. If you haven’t read it, I strongly encourage you to do so. I’ve posted a link to the online article on our website.

Altar Servers for the Extraordinary Form Mass. Fr. John Lovell has graciously agreed to train boys to serve the EF Mass. It will be more challenging than the regular “ordinary form” Mass the boys normally serve, so it requires a real commitment. Even so, it is not that hard to learn and it will be an exciting challenge. Any boys interested should contact me in the next 2 weeks at the parish office, by phone or email.

“Accommodating” Religious Liberty. On Friday, February 10, President Obama announced an “accommodation” regarding the HHS regulations requiring all health insurance policies to pay for contraception, sterilization and abortifacients. The media is presenting it as a great compromise—but it’s nothing of the sort. As Bishop Loverde has said: “Make no mistake: this ‘accommodation,’ as described, is no accommodation at all, but rather remains a direct violation to our right to religious liberty.” (See His entire statement in the bulletin insert.)

The President really didn’t change *anything of substance*—just played a little shell game. He says he won’t make religious *institutions*, like hospitals, buy insurance to cover contraception, sterilization and abortion. Instead he’ll make the *insurance* company provide those “services” “*free*” of charge. Does he really think that insurance companies will do that *for free*? There is no law in this land that can force them to do that. And there’s no such thing as a free lunch—inevitably the overall premiums will simply go up, and the Church, or individual Catholics, will wind up paying for it one way or another.

But even if somehow the laws of economics would be suspended, it’s not really about the *money*, it’s about *providing immoral services*. Think about this: the policy *before* forced church institutions to buy insurance policies that provide contraception, sterilization and abortion; the policy *after* forces church institutions to buy an insurance policies that provide contraception, sterilization and abortion. *Nothing’s* changed.

Beyond that, the president’s accommodation applies only to “religious *organizations*.” It does nothing for the *individual* Catholics who buy insurance for *themselves*, or the Catholic *business* man or woman who buy insurance for their employees. What about *their* right to free exercise of religion?

The Bishops have rejected the President’s proposal for these and other reasons, and have called for the HHS regulation to be withdrawn or for congressional action to override it. I have been *extremely* proud of the bishops’ courage and wisdom. But like all of us, bishops can fall, especially under the tremendous pressure that they are under. So they need our continued uncompromising support, especially our prayers. Pray for them, and for priests. And pray for our President, for his safety and conversion.

***Oremus pro invicem.* Fr. De Celles**